

Citizens League
545 Syndicate Building
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402

STATEMENT TO THE PUBLIC HEARING ON THE PROPOSED METROPOLITAN COUNCIL GUIDE:

"SANITARY SEWERS--POLICIES, SYSTEM PLAN, PROGRAM" DECEMBER 29, 1969

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The various questions which may be raised here this evening about specifics of this metropolitan sewer plan ought not to obscure the accomplishment this plan represents.

The long, detailed--and occasionally heated--debate over the way in which this community should handle the discharge of its wastes has resulted in a legislative decision to organize and finance this major capital system on a fully area-wide basis. The Citizens League has long believed this would bring major benefits to the Twin Cities area over the long run.

The plan under discussion here tonight is the first step toward a detailing of the actions than must be taken to carry out this legislative mandate. It is most important as a statement of the policies to be followed in the development of this central utility system. We hope discussion, at this stage, will focus on them.

They are not the policies that have been followed in this area in the past . . . as the various jurisdictions responsible for installing major interceptors and treatment plants built various pieces of a system--not always ahead of development, not always in line with community priorities, and not always with sufficient respect for areas that ought not to be developed, or developed at a particular time.

Certainly, the policies proposed here are not the policies being followed in most major urban areas.

The adoption, here, now, for the Twin Cities area, of a policy of orderly extension of the central system, based around watersheds, ahead of development, preserving lakes and small streams, and serving to carry out an overall plan for the growth of the area as a whole, will be a very major achievement.

So will be the opportunity, once the major facilities are under the central management of the Metropolitan Sewer Board, to operate the treatment works as a single, integrated system. The Board will have the capability to monitor, continuously, the conditions of the rivers and the discharges coming into them. . . and-from its "control tower"--to make all the adjustments necessary to maintain maximum levels of water quality through the area as a whole. If a plant at one location goes down for maintenance, or because of an accident, treatment can be temporarily upgraded at other plants, or wastes temporarily withheld, or flows augmented . . . and these excess costs absorbed into the overall system.

These operational advantages of a metropolitan system are also, though perhaps less generally discussed, a major advantage, and a major accomplishment.

Much remains to be done, of course, to apply these various policies to particular situations on the ground.

The areas into which sewer should not be extended remain to be defined. So do the areas that are subject to immediate threats to public health, and areas that are scheduled to be opened up for development within five years in accord with metropolitan development objectives. Finally, of course, there are a few key elements even of the system plan for major interceptors and treatment plants not yet resolved, which must be resolved within the coming year.

Others at this hearing, representing municipal government in the various parts of the Twin Cities area, are much better equipped than we are to move on to the implications of the proposed policies, for their communities . . . and to discuss the implications of the service areas proposed. I would like to concentrate, just briefly, on the two major questions in the basic system plan for major treatment works that remain unresolved in the plan at this stage. These are in the sections having to do with the St. Croix River, and with the upper reaches of the Mississippi River. We believe fundamental questions are raised.

Both areas present difficult technical and policy questions. And, though surely decisions must be made relatively soon, it is probably well that both areas are to be studied further.

Our concern would be that, as this re-study takes place, it begin with what we have always been convinced must be the basic issue: That is, the use to be made of the river valleys. A plan and development program for sewerage works should, then, develop out of this underlying policy.

A good many major urban areas have no opportunity for such a basic policy decision: More than a century of development, and a host of decisions and mistakes, before the advent of real planning, have committed them to heavy use of virtually all stretches of their rivers for waste disposal.

The remarkable opportunity for this area, which we think must be the basis of our action here, is the chance really to save large stretches of major waterways, by a decision to specialize various stretches for different purposes . . . rather than to develop 'multiple uses' within each given stretch.

Our present stage of development still leaves room for this. And, increasingly, the Metropolitan Council has the governmental tools to carry out this kind of land-development policy (for, at bottom, our waste disposal policy is essentially a land-use policy.)

We must not take the wrong implication from what we have said to ourselves, these past eight years. We have been--and rightly--concerned not to discharge wastes into a part of a river where a significant risk exists the effluent could not be assimilated.

It would be possible--though wrong--to conclude from this that, then, a treatment plant is appropriate on a cold, clear stream where the effluent could be absorbed with little visible impact.

Increasingly, we think, the public is likely to prefer that the few clear streams that remain be carefully protected, and remain just what they are. Clearly, this is the attitude development with respect to the St. Croix.

Policy Number 2 in this proposed plan provides that, prior to the design and development of treatment works, the various stretches of the rivers be zoned, in terms of the uses to be made of each. We strongly support this policy, and feel it must be the basis of the solution arrived-at for the St. Croix and for the Mississippi below Fridley.

Recognizing that this 'zoning' has not been completed for these two major stretches of river, we would have expected to see it appear as a major item of work in the 'program' laid out beginning on Page 27. What does appear there, in items #8 and #10 (to be completed by the end of 1970) is this:

8. Determination of whether a treatment plant should be constructed in Fridley or if flow from the North Suburban Service Area is to continue to be treated at the Pig's Eye treatment works.
10. Determination of the desirability of diverting sewage from the St. Croix watershed.

Possibly this is intended to include the kind of basic decision about river valley use contemplated in Policy Number 2. It may be useful, in any case, to make these work program items somewhat more explicit.

For the heart of the question is the trade-off between waste disposal and recreation. The two are inevitably linked together. We think there is a problem, in this respect, created as a result of the procedure which calls for adopting the development guide 'in pieces' . . . more important, in pieces which cut the real question about the future of the major river valleys apart into abstract functions: sewer, open space, etc.

As the Sewer Board takes over the ownership and operation of treatment plants, and becomes the largest discharger of wastes in the Metropolitan area; and as the financial considerations close in around them, it will be increasingly difficult to maintain a properly balanced and comprehensive view of the development of these valleys, as between their use for waste disposal and their use for recreation.

If a clear plan for the river valleys had emerged from the consultants study, there would probably be less need for any concern on this point. But his final report, dated June 1969, seems--to the outside, lay observer, at any rate--to offer little to the Sewer Board, and the Council, with respect to the decisions affecting the St. Croix and upper Mississippi.

We would suggest that, as the Sewer Board and the Council's own engineers take up this question during the next twelve months, a procedure be worked out with the various agencies interested in these river valleys . . . so that, when the plan is amended and a decision is proposed, the comments of these agencies are attached as the document is circulated prior to the public hearing.

A procedure of this sort is customary in the Federal Government, for example: Before any agency can take a proposal to Congress, it must have been cleared for comment by all other affected agencies of the Executive Branch, and their comments made a part of the record.

The Council would be in a better position to evaluate a proposal of the Sewer Board, we believe, if its proposal were reviewed by the Open Space Board, perhaps the Minnesota-Wisconsin Boundary Area Commission, the Minneapolis Housing and Redevelopment Authority, the University of Minnesota, the Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, and other official agencies. It would be a service to the public, as well.

Thank you.